# THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM

BY THE REV.

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# THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM

CHRISTIANITY has a paradox at its very heart. It claims our belief in God as Almighty Ruler of all the world, Maker of the Universe and Controller of History; and in the same breath it bids us strive and pray for the coming of the Kingdom of God into a world which defies His authority and ignores His will. This same paradox enters into the life of each Christian individual. Perhaps its sharpest expression is to be found in the familiar words of St. Paul: "If ye then *be* risen with the Messiah, *seek* those things which are above." The same paradox is apparent in the doctrine and life of the Church, which is the Body of the sinless Christ though its members, who constitute it, are far from sinlessness.

This paradox is a product of the fullness of life in the Christian religion. To the analytic

intellect life must always be a paradox; it is not irrational nor even illogical, but it moves by the interaction within it of elements which for logic are bound to appear contradictory to one another. We will not therefore attempt a solution or even a summary of the problem until the main facts which constitute it are before us.

The original Gospel which Christ preached was the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. "The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe the Gospel." The Gospel—the good news—is, of course, just this announcement of the nearness of the Kingdom. Its advent was a consummation. It was that towards which all history was moving. It was the attainment of the goal of humanity. Certainly nothing could reasonably be called a Kingdom if it consisted merely in a boon granted to individual souls. To understand the Kingdom of God and to find the true principles on which the life of man as a social and political being should be governed are one and the same thing.

But we return to the paradox. How could God's Kingdom *come*? Was it not there from everlasting? Is not God eternally the

Almighty Ruler of the universe? Let us begin the answer to this question by asking another: When is authority realized? And in the beginning to answer this, let us follow the suggestion supplied by the metaphor according to which we attribute the uniform behaviour of physical bodies to Laws of Nature. The "Law" of Nature has no aim beyond itself; but it always operates. If I am standing on the edge of a cliff, it is my power to stay where I am or to jump forward; but if I jump forward I have no longer any choice whether I remain suspended in mid-air or fall to the bottom. The forces of nature are unaffected in any case, and in any case they operate.

When we pass to the Law of the State there is introduced the wholly new element of an intention expressed in the Law; and this sometimes obscures the fact that the Law sometimes works even though its intention is defeated. The Law says "Those who steal must go to prison"; and when a thief is convicted and sent to prison the Law has acted and has asserted its supremacy. The Law remains supreme, even when it is broken. But it does not do this invariably. It may be evaded and outwitted; then it is

really broken. And the chief harm of criminal action which is undetected and unpunished is not to be found in the injury inflicted on some person or persons, but in the lowered dignity of the Law, the consequent loss of stability and mutual trust in society as a whole, and the damage to both liberty and character which this will cause to all citizens in that community. This point is so important that, at the risk of irrelevance, I emphasize it. The chief harm about lying is not the deceit of the person to whom the lie is told, but the general diminution of mutual trust and the consequent loss of trustworthiness. When, however, the Law can apprehend and punish the criminal it asserts its supremacy, and in the letter it is fulfilled.

If we turn to the Law of God we at once have to combine these two. Like the Law of the State it has an intention ; but like the Law of the State it may assert its supremacy even when its intention is defied. And like the Law of Nature it always operates. You cannot evade it or outwit it. There is no part of the universe where, to use the legal formula, God's writ does not run. God, the Supreme Power, is of such and such a character ; that is the decisive fact. A man or a

nation may ignore this or defy it, as a man may jump over a cliff. But in doing that he is inviting disaster. All plans or schemes which are rooted on principles at variance with God's Law must come at last, if not at first, to catastrophe, because they fly in the face of the nature of things. In this sense at least God is always supreme. And this is the point securely reached in the Old Testament, with many an aspiration after something more.

For though the Law asserts its supremacy when it imposes penalties upon wrong-doers, it does not thus achieve its object. The law which condemns thieves to imprisonment is not aiming at sending men to prison but at checking theft. Therefore though the law vindicates its supremacy against the thief, it has failed to reach its object. And the same is true of the Law of God, who has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth.

We must not indeed suppose that the law, whether human or Divine, has no effect except so far as it is expressly set in motion. Whenever a man is tempted to dishonesty but pursues the honest course for fear of what the law would otherwise inflict, the law has had effect. But even when we remember

this, we still see that the very methods of law are such that it can never by itself achieve its own object. For so soon as any man supposes himself safe from detection, or whenever his temptation is so strong as to obscure the dictates of prudence, then, if fear of legal consequence is all that supports him, he will fall. Nothing can ensure the conduct which law desires to produce except a certain disposition of the heart and will. To effect that disposition then is the only way to attain what all law, human or Divine, is striving after.

But there is in our own experience only one way of guiding the heart and will; that is by love revealed in its own act of sacrifice, which may be defined as the doing or suffering of what, apart from love, we should not choose to do or to suffer. Purpose and affection cannot be forced; they can only be "won," as the phrase is. They will never yield to threat, but they yield to appeal. Above all, to the appeal of love no heart is quite indifferent. It is for this reason that Christ can say of His apparent contradiction of the old law (*e.g.*, St. Matt. v. 38-42) that it is its fulfilment or completion (17). The method He enjoins is that which alone can in the end

achieve what all legal action aims at; for it can convert the evil will. A man who suffers the injuries or vexations enumerated in verses 39-42—which are plainly chosen because to pride or self-concern they are peculiarly irritating—and who meets them with love or concern for the other instead of resentment or concern for self, may win the heart of his enemy. No doubt our Lord has a place for sternness and even for violence in breaking the hard crust which prevents the appeal of love from reaching the heart; but this is only preparatory. The real work of love is only done by love's own method of sacrifice.

The Cross is the practical application of this rule. There we see how God meets the injuries that we inflict on Him. When He is reviled, He reviles not again; when He suffers, He threatens not. Behind the inexorable law that will by no means clear the guilty, so that the Incarnate Love compares Himself to the stone upon which whosoever falls shall be broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust—behind the Law is the Lawgiver and Judge, Himself bearing the burden in self-forgetful love.

The revelation of this love is the second stage in the Coming of the Kingdom. The

first is the supremacy of the Divine Law : the second is the revelation of the Divine Love, whereby our hearts and wills may be won from rebelliousness to loyalty. Let us consider the actual means by which He set Himself to this task.

At His Baptism He felt Himself called to begin at once His Messianic ministry. He goes into the wilderness to meet temptations arising out of that call. The first is the natural temptation to use the power, with which as Messiah He is endowed, to satisfy creature comforts. The other two are suggested by the pictures in which the Prophets of Israel had clothed their hopes of a divinely sent Deliverer. Should He be a Statesman—Christ, like Isaiah's "Wonderful Counsellor," ruling from the throne of David ? He looks out over the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them and knows that He can win them if He will fall down and worship the Prince of this world. Or shall He give to Himself and to the multitudes that sign from heaven which the Pharisees would afterwards demand, appearing in Jerusalem up-borne by angels, fulfilling Daniel's vision of the Son of Man ?

No : both the prevailing types of Messianic

anticipation He rejects. He comes into Galilee proclaiming the Kingdom as John had done. He heals the sick; and His miracles of healing create a great excitement. That is not at all His purpose. He withdraws from that excitement, and when St. Peter comes to Him with the announcement "all are seeking Thee," He answers, "Let us go elsewhere into the next towns, that I may make the proclamation there also" (St. Mark i. 14-38).

St. John the Baptist had recognized Him for what He was. He expected the ministry to work up to some supremely great event, worthy of God's Messiah. But all there was to show was a few blind folk who could see, a few deaf folk who could hear, a few lepers cleansed, even a few dead folk restored to life. It was "when John heard in the prison the works of the Christ" that he sent to ask if He were indeed the Coming One. The answer is to be the rehearsal of just those works which to John seemed so inadequate, ending with the words, "And blessed is he whosoever is not scandalized at Me." The Lord goes on to say that John is the greatest of the prophets; but he that is least in the Kingdom is greater still (St. Matt. xi. 2-11). It was not the power in His works which was evidence

of His Messiahship; excitement caused by this was to be avoided; it was the fact that the power was used solely for purposes of love. For His Kingdom is the reign of love.

As opposition increases the Lord concentrates on a few chosen friends. "He appointed twelve that they might be with Him" (St. Mark iii. 14). With them He goes on two long walking tours. There is nothing which so much creates and fosters intimacy as a walking tour. He takes them away from the sphere of the Jewish religion and therefore away from controversy. Few episodes, we may imagine, took place by the way; certainly few are recorded. But to Syrophenicia and back is a long walking tour; and as soon as they are returned, He starts on another to Cæsarea Philippi. There He feels that the time is come. He puts to them the question, "Whom do men say that I am?" They mention the various conjectures. "Whom say ye that I am." St. Peter, with a leap of inspired insight or perhaps with a conviction originally suggested by the Baptist and now come to maturity, answers, "Thou art the Messiah." As soon as He has been thus freely recognized, He begins to say what He had never said before, "The Son of Man

must suffer." That is His Messianic Act. And in that act the followers of the Messiah must identify themselves with Him (St. Mark viii. 27-38).

As He began, so soon as He was freely recognized, to describe what His Messianic act should be, so at once He starts for Jerusalem where by the Triumphal Entry He will challenge authority, precipitate the Passion and accomplish that Messianic act. On that journey the minds of the disciples are, naturally enough, filled with the thoughts suggested by His acceptance of the Messianic title. He is about to found the Kingdom. So when the little children flock round Him as usual, the disciples drive them away; He will not want to be troubled with children now. But He is indignant and says, "Let the little children come to Me; do not forbid them: they are the kind of people My Kingdom is made of" (St. Mark x. 13, 14). On that same journey the two sons of Zebedee come with their request for the chief places at His Court. His answer is to draw a sharp distinction between the method of His Kingdom and the method of all earthly Kingdoms. "And Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted

to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you: but whosoever would become great among you, shall be servant of all. For verily the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (St. Mark x. 42-5). His will is to be imposed on no one, but their allegiance to it is to be secured through calling out their free devotion. He speaks more and more emphatically of the immediate advent of the Kingdom in its power. As He sits upon the Mount of Olives and looks down on the city at His feet, its inevitable fall becomes a symbol of the break-up of organizations that reject Him and the opening of the way for His Kingdom. That city had received in more abundance than any other place on earth the blessing of God; but just because His truth and goodness had been so bountifully lavished upon it, the people were content with what they had and refused the higher gift when it was offered them. If they could have accepted Him as the promised Messiah and realized that their destiny was spiritual, not political, Jerusalem need never have fallen; but it clung to its old ambitions

until it became a nuisance to Imperial Rome; and Imperial Rome was not in the habit of tolerating nuisances. The state of mind which could not accept Christ was the state of mind which would provoke the destruction of Jerusalem under Titus. "And when he drew nigh, he saw the city and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known in this day, even thou, the things which belong unto peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, when thine enemies shall cast up a bank about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall dash thee to the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation" (St. Luke xix. 41-4).

But the fall of Jerusalem is the sweeping away of the chief barrier to the advance of His Kingdom. It is the end of the world or the end of the age. There have been other ends of the world; there was the end of the ancient world at the Reformation; there was the end of the world of feudalism and autocracy, at least for Western Europe, in the French Revolution; we are living now in an end of the world. Every time that

some form of civilization collapses because it is not built upon the truth as it is in Christ, we see the Son of Man come in Judgment and a world ending. No doubt at first the disciples were inclined to interpret His words in the light of their lesser meaning as they had been used by former teachers. It is the destiny of every supreme genius to be misunderstood in just that way; he must use the language that men speak if he is to be understood at all, but that language is fashioned to express their thoughts and His greater thought transcends it. There exists no vehicle really adequate for its expression. But we may see how the leaven of His teaching worked. We watch the change from the expectation of a sudden dramatic close to this age, as it is seen in St. Paul's earlier Epistles, to his long outlook down the ages in the Epistle to the Ephesians; and we notice how in the place occupied by the great apocalyptic discourse in St. Mark's Gospel, St. John sets the discourse in the upper chamber about the coming of the Spirit. This does not take us further from the mind of Christ but deeper into it.

As He has insisted that the coming of His Kingdom in its power is imminent, so before

the High Priest He claims that it has now come. In answer to the question whether He is the Messiah He answers, "I am, and from now onwards there shall be the Son of Man seated on the right hand of power" (St. Matt. xxvi. 64; St. Luke xxii. 69. See Greek text). In that moment Daniel's prophecy is fulfilled, just as in that moment His glory is made known. As He dedicates Himself to the final sacrifice, He prays: "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." Because Love is now expressing itself in the fullest form in its own act of sacrifice, therefore now the Eternal Glory is revealed. The coming of the Son of Man with power is the manifestation of His love, and the seal of God upon that manifestation; it is the Cross and Resurrection with all that follows from it. Our Lord never speaks of a *second* coming nor of coming *again*, except indeed when He speaks of His return in the person of the Spirit; "I will not leave you desolate: I come unto you." He speaks of "the coming of the Son of Man," and at His trial declares that in His Passion that is accomplished.

The life of our Lord is therefore the second

stage in the coming of the Kingdom; it is the revelation of God's love whereby that love calls forth our answering devotion, and is therefore the means whereby God obtains over our souls that further power which can only be exercised upon free spirits by this means. It is as exercising this further power gained through the revelation of His love and the eliciting of our answering devotion that God is known to Christians as the Holy Spirit.

This winning of human souls to answer God's love with theirs is a process which from the date of the Passion and Resurrection continues until the consummation of the ages. This is the third stage in the coming of the Kingdom. In it we live and render our service.

Thus we have these three stages: (1) The supremacy of the Divine law; (2) the revelation of the Divine love; (3) the response of our hearts to that love. These must not be connected with the three Persons in the blessed Trinity, for each of these stages is concerned with God as He works in the process of Time.

We are living in an end of the world. The old order of things which rested largely on self-seeking and force is involved in catastrophe

before our eyes. Once more the supremacy of the Divine law of love is asserted. Once more the Kingdom in its first phase or stage is manifested as a plain fact. What are we going to do? Shall we drift back into the old ways, trusting once more to self-seeking and force and political faction, though it may be with different political machinery, building up a civilization which will certainly come to similar collapse? Or are we going to put ourselves unreservedly into the hands of Christ that His Holy Spirit may use us as instruments of His purpose to build that Holy City, the perfected civilization, which men can never construct of themselves, but which must always come down out of heaven from God? Will nations still stand over against one another in suspicion and distrust, contriving a delicate "balance of power" until a new calamity overwhelms the world, or will they say that they exist not for themselves alone but first and foremost to serve the Kingdom of God, which includes all nations, so that in the interest of that Kingdom each will be ready to suffer material loss to itself? Shall we again have capital and labour standing over against each other in hostility and suspicion, or shall we see them

come together in desire to serve the community? The whole thing is so simple and yet so tremendous. Imagine a labour dispute in which each party comes to the conference desiring justice more than advantage, and eager that if either is to suffer injury it should be itself. That would be the Christian temper; that would be the application in such a case of the fundamental principle, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His justice." And it is perfectly plain that if men would only do this the promise would be fulfilled, and the distribution of material things ("What ye shall eat or wherewithal ye shall be clothed") would come right of itself. Is this impossible? Certainly not; if there is any grace in Christ and any power of the Holy Spirit.

Our task then is to submit ourselves far more completely to the influence of the love of God working in our hearts through the power which He gains over them by the revelation of His Love in Christ's death and resurrection. So we become truly members of the Body of Christ—that is to say, instruments of His will, acting only with the energy of God, so that we may worthily be called "partakers of the Divine nature" (2 St. Peter i. 4).

I said just now that we must not identify the three great stages in the coming of the Kingdom with the specific activities of the Three Persons of the Trinity, as is sometimes done by the saying that in the Bible the Old Testament gives the revelation of the Father, the Gospels the revelation of the Son, the Acts and Epistles the revelation of the Holy Spirit. God as revealed to men is always the Divine Word. In the Old Testament we see God taking the figure of Jehovah, god of Sinai, and using it as a medium of His self-revelation; from that time on Jehovah becomes the Divine Word so far as that Word was yet spoken. In Jesus of Nazareth the light that had fitfully shone blazed forth in its fullness; He is the light that lighteneth every man, the effulgence of the glory of God and express image of His Person. Jehovah is not God the Father; Jehovah is the partial revelation of God which was given in its completeness in Jesus Christ. Jehovah is God the Son imperfectly apprehensible; Jesus Christ is God the Son perfectly apprehensible, though not yet perfectly apprehended.

God the Holy Spirit is God as He works in Nature and in our hearts and wills eliciting

perfect conformity to His own character of Order and Love. Before the full objective revelation was given in the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ, it made little or no difference, it was said that the Word of the Lord or the Spirit of the Lord had acted. To say as the prophets did that the Word of the Lord came to them, and to say, as we say of them, that the Holy Ghost spake by them, is to say one and the same thing. And we know that the early Church had some difficulty in distinguishing between the Son and the Spirit. But when once the full revelation was objectively given, in the Person of the Son, the Spirit became known as the power of God within the heart calling forth the response which only now became possible in its completeness. So the Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier of the elect; for the elect are those to whom, for no merit of their own, the supreme blessing is given of knowing God in Jesus Christ, and that knowledge is the medium through which God exerts His power over our hearts and wills. Hence St. John says quite definitely: "There was not yet Spirit because Jesus was not yet glorified" (St. John vii. 39). And, as we have seen, the very essence of His glory is the sacrifice in

which His love is both consummated and revealed.

God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are God as He is made known to us in experience —God active in the process of Time. But that activity is no meaningless energy. It is the expression in Time of what God eternally is. Behind the Redeemer and the Sanctifier is God the Creator, of whose eternal will and thought all history is the product and expression. But God the Father, of an infinite Majesty, is the same God as He whom we have seen crucified and crowned with thorns, the same as He who aids our prayers and yearnings with groanings that cannot be uttered. The process of History, with its agonies that are transformed into glories and its defeats that are made the very material of triumph, as we see when in the Cross and Resurrection not merely enemies but defeat itself is defeated and captivity made captive —this age-long process is the wrought-out purpose of the eternal will, the perfect embodiment of the eternal thought. God the Father must not be divided from the Son and Holy Spirit any more than they may be divided from Him. It is in and through His work, His agony, His triumph in History,

that His eternal perfection is achieved and consists.

But if this be so, how exalted is our calling. We know indeed that our salvation is no selfish possession or attainment, and cannot be found so long as we seek it; it consists in our giving ourselves to the cause of the Kingdom of God. But when we are thus dedicated, and as we pray and strive for the coming of that Kingdom, we become indeed "partakers of the Divine Nature" and partners, by the grace of our Lord, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit, in that activity of God whereby He is God.

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